

Marshall Key House
Main Street
Washington
Mason County
Kentucky

HABS No. KY-127

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MARSHALL KEY HOUSE

HABS No. KY-127

Location: Main Street, Washington, Mason County, Kentucky.
Latitude: 38°36'53" Longitude: 83°48'31"

Present Owner: Mrs. James Allen

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: Residence, when occupied.

Significance: The brick Georgian townhouse, built circa 1800, is one of the finest historic structures in Washington. It is distinguished by a handsome Georgian frontispiece and an elegant curved interior stairway. The well-proportioned Federal style mantelpieces and molded chair railings are particularly noteworthy. Behind the house is a small, two-story brick structure, known as an "Indian Fort", which reputedly provided protection against attack by hostile Indians. Harriet Beecher Stowe visited the house in 1833 and attended a slavery auction at the old courthouse which was later the basis for Uncle Tom's Cabin.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Circa 1800. The form, character, and exterior embellishments of the original brick portion of the house are stylistically Georgian, although the interior detailing is Federal. Because the house is transitional in style, and because styles changed slowly on the trans-appalachian frontier, it is difficult to place an exact date of construction. Between 1795 and 1815, the value of the property increased rapidly, indicating a span of years during which construction could have occurred. In 1795, Eli Metcalfe purchased the property and sold it a year later at a considerable profit. In 1796, Metcalfe sold the property to Francis Taylor, a prominent young lawyer, who certainly would have the means to erect the house. It is possible that he bought the house in a semi-finished state, although there is no concrete evidence to substantiate this suggestion. Taylor is probably responsible for the erection of the present brick portion about 1800. Certain architectural aspects of the house are markedly similar to other regional examples, notably Federal Hill in Bardstown and the Marshall house (Federal Hill), as originally built, in Washington

circa 1800. When Taylor sold the property to Marshall Key in 1815, the price was high enough to indicate that the lot was considerably developed. The outbuilding known locally as the "Indian Fort," is probably contemporary with the brick portion of the house.

2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The following is a complete chain of the title to the property on which the structure stands. Reference is to the office of the Mason County Court Clerk, Maysville, Kentucky.

South half, in-lot 27 --- Reference: Mason County Atlas, 1876

Deed Book A,	P. 6 --- July 29, 1789 --- William Wood and Arthur Fox to Robert Rankin --- in-lots 55, 27, 29.
Deed Book A,	P. 20 --- October 27, 1789 --- Robert Rankin to Robert Brown --- in-lot 27.
Deed Book B-1,	P. 272 --- April 29, 1795 --- Robert Brown to Eli Metcalf (e) --- south half, in-lot 27 --- sold for "ten pound" Kentucky currency. Lot 29 owned by John Rogers.
Deed Book C,	P. 513 --- April 30, 1796 --- Eli Metcalf to Francis Taylor --- south half in-lot 27 --- 66' frontage on Main - sold for 275 pounds currency.
Deed Book O,	P. 259 --- February 27, 1815 --- Francis Taylor to Marshall Key --- south half in-lot 27 --- also part of in-lot 29 --- bounded on south by "that part of 29 occupied by Robert Taylor, Jr." (see deed of October, 1804, Chambers to Taylor, lot 29) --- property sold for \$5,000.00.
Deed Book 71,	P. 511 --- September 10, 1866 --- Marshall Key to John S. Forman.
Deed Book 76,	P. 272 --- July 26, 1869, February 25, 1873 --- John S. Forman to Charles W. Forman.
Deed Book 81,	P. 169 --- August 6, 1879 --- Charles W. Forman to James Marshall.

Deed Book 130, P. 616 --- January 11, 1930 ---
(Commissioner's Sale) to Cleon Wadsworth ---
incl. "brick residence".

Deed Book 130 P. 613 --- February 24, 1930 --- Cleon
Wadsworth to Calvert and Amos Case, and
William Davis --- 137' frontage on Main north
of Presbyterian parsonage --- including
"brick dwelling house."

Deed Book 149, P. 341 --- September 10, 1951 --- Calvert and
Amos Case, and William Davis to J. S. and
Ruth Allen.

4. Builder: Eli Metcalfe was the older brother of Kentucky Governor Thomas "Stonehammer" Metcalfe, so-named because of his profession as a stonemason. Eli Metcalfe was married to the sister of John Pickett, who owned the stone house property across the street at that time. There may be a connection between the construction of the two houses, since both are the hall-and-parlor plan, although the stone house is considerably smaller. Eli's other brother, John, was a Bourbon County stonemason, but it is not known if Eli himself was a builder. He possibly had the correct connections, however, had he decided to erect a house in Washington.
5. Original plans and construction: The handsome Georgian doorway on the main facade appears to be original. Obviously a late 18th century "builder's handbook" design, the frontispiece is similar to the entrances of Federal Hill, Bardstown (1795-1815), Liberty Hall (1796-1804), and the old Governor's residence, Frankfort (1798). Such frontispieces were often applied to relatively simple Georgian masses and are a contrast to later "geometric" or Federal style doorways, which were integrated into the facade rather than applied externally. The elegant stairway and handsome mantelpieces in the interior appear to be original, although, according to the present owner, applied plaster decoration of possibly later date was removed from the parlor mantelpiece. This decoration was of classical design much like that in the Washington home of Key's uncle, Thomas Marshall. Both mantels in the brick portion of the house are similar to other regional examples, notably Federal Hill (Bardstown) and Clay Hill (Harrodsburg). The stairway shows a marked similarity in step-end and baluster design to a number of early 19th century houses, including Federal Hill and Wickland (Bardstown), as well as the Murphy-Lashbrooke and Marshall houses in Washington. These designs are most likely adaptations from builder's handbook models of the period.

Examination of the brickwork of the south wall of the house indicates that another structure was adjoined to that wall and was evidently erected earlier than the present house. The earlier structure was apparently in existence as late as 1876, as its general plan is shown in An Illustrated Atlas of Mason County, Kentucky of that year (p 37). It was evidently of a size similar to the present house and was bordered by a sidewalk. Brickwork of the south wall of the present house indicates that the roofline of that house was several feet higher than that of the earlier building. The bricks of the existing structure were laid up rough until they passed the roofline of the earlier building. Above that line they are smoothly laid up and evenly pointed. After 1876, this mysterious early structure was replaced by the present clapboard dining room wing. A window also was cut into the south wall of the upstairs hall. The present brick structure was erected possibly as an addition to the earlier structure to the south. Although there was evidently no means of communication from the second story, a door in the south wall of the downstairs hall was possibly an interior door, communicating with the adjoining structure.

An outbuilding east of the main house is particularly noteworthy. This small brick structure of two stories, with an exterior door on each level, has been known for many years as an "Indian Fort", built, according to local tradition, for protection against Indian attack. There are vertical slits beveled inward through the brick walls of the second story at approximately 30°. These slits appear to be gun-ports. Most of these slits, however, are too narrow to admit the barrel of an early rifle. Originally, there was no inside communication between levels. In case of hostile attack, the building would have been particularly vulnerable to fire. It is impossible to disprove completely the building's design as a fortification, but it is more likely that the structure was a dual purpose utility building. Aside from the vertical slits in the walls, the diamond-shaped vents in the brick of the gables is identical to several regional smokehouses. Furthermore, existing smokehouses in the region show a degree of variety and imagination in the design of ventilation methods, which possibly explains the presence of beveled vertical slits in addition to the more common vent pattern found in gables. At present, there is a rectangular opening approximately 3'x2' in the northwest corner of the floor of the first level, affording some access between levels. Originally, the only access to the second story was through a door in the south wall, which is protected by an overhanging roof. There were no outside stairs to the second level. A removable ladder was utilized, thereby affording a certain amount of protection for the meats inside from four-and two-legged marauders. The ground floor chamber was probably a dairy or washroom, although the interior has been remodeled and there is no documentary evidence to support this suggestion.

The outbuilding has been called, in addition to an "Indian Fort" and smokehouse, a slave cabin. An interview with Mr. W. W. Catron of Washington, on June 18, 1975, confirmed that he used the building as a smokehouse in the 1920s, but that he has always heard it called an "Indian Fort". Investigation of two other reputed "Indian Forts" in the county revealed a total lack of "gun-slits", indicating that they would have been completely indefensible and an invitation for the inhabitants to be baked alive by fires set on the outside of the building. The outbuilding is the only structure in the area with vertical slits in the walls.

According to local witnesses the outbuilding was attached to the main house by a kitchen wing or "summer kitchen", which fell into disrepair and was removed early in the 20th century. The total structure was probably similar to existing complexes consisting of main house and attached service wing (e.g. Federal Hill at Bardstown). No plans or views of this connecting structure have been located.

6. Alterations and additions: The existing brick structure has been little altered. The stairway, mantels, and many exterior shutters appear to be original. The basement, now a crawlspace, was filled in the 20th century with several feet of dirt to correct a drainage problem. A fireplace once stood in the basement, indicating that the area was formerly a kitchen or servant's quarters. The large room on the second floor was at one time divided into three smaller rooms, and the partitions have since been removed. This partitioning was probably contemporary with the addition of the present one-story clapboard dining room wing. The dining room wing was erected about 1880, soon after the property was purchased by James Marshall. It has remained essentially unaltered except for the recent addition of a kitchen and porch on the east side. This addition was designed to harmonize with the clapboard wing. The addition of 1880 retains its original late 19th century mantels and is distinguished by a wooden decorative motif on the south gable. Recent alterations in the brick house include the replacement of the late 19th century two-light sash with reproduction multi-paned sash. Lathe-turned columns and decorative "gingerbread" elements on the porch of the dining room wing have been replaced by aluminum Doric columns, and the porch floor is now poured concrete, as are the entry steps at the front door.
- B. Historical Context: Francis Taylor was a prominent lawyer in Washington. His parlor was the scene of 1803 marriage of John Chambers, who later became Territorial Governor of Iowa. Marshall Key, who lived in the house from 1815 to 1866, was one of the large landowners in Mason County and a nephew of Chief Justice John

Marshall, whose brother Thomas built a house in Washington, "Federal Hill", about 1800. The house gained a certain notoriety as the house in which Harriet Beecher Stowe stayed during a visit to Washington in the summer of 1833. While visiting a daughter of Marshall Key, Mrs. Stowe, then Miss Beecher, witnessed a slave auction at the Court House in Washington (1794-1909) and drew upon this and other experiences for material for Uncle Tom's Cabin. One newspaper source has credited the outbuilding behind the house as being the home of a "real-life Uncle Tom".

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This is a good example of a well-executed Georgian house, with a contrasting Victorian addition.
2. Condition of fabric: Good to excellent.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The L-shaped building, which includes the additon, measures approximately 32'x52', and the front elevation of the brick portion is three bays. The brick portion is two stories high and the addition is one story high.
2. Foundations: Undressed limestone foundations are approximately 20" thick for the brick part of the house. A limestone and brick foundation supports the Victorian addition.
3. Walls: The original part of the house is of Flemish bond brick, which was once painted grey. A protruding water table is found only in front elevation. The Victorian addition is sheathed with clapboards and wooden vertical trim.
4. Structural system, framing: Brick bearing walls with wood framing constitutes the brick house's structural system. Attic rafter joists are lapped and pegged. Braces have been placed in the crawlspace, providing stablization for the first floor. The Victorian addition is a frame structure.
5. Porches, stoop: A L-shaped porch is adjoined to the brick house's south wall and to the clapboard addition's west wall. It has a concrete floor and aluminum Doric columns, both new replacements. A screened porch appears at the rear of the addition. A concrete two-step stoop provides entrance to the main front door.

6. Chimneys: A corbeled brick chimney (coursing setting back as it rises) appears at the north end of the roof over the brick portion of the house.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: A Georgian doorway provides the main (west) entrance to the brick house. It is handsome in appearance, with an entablature consisting of a semi-circular-fanlight, reeded Doric columns and a projecting top. The building has three other doors at the first floor: a louvered door to the south side rear screened porch; a two-panel-over-two-panel door to the west side of the L-shaped porch, and another louvered door to the south side of the brick house.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Two twenty-over-twenty double-hung sash windows appear on the front first floor of the brick house, while above the second floor, three fifteen-over-fifteen double-hung sash windows exist. A twelve-over-twelve double-hung sash window appears on the south brick wall of the second floor. The second floor of the rear (east) side of the brick house is punctuated with three openings: two fifteen-over-fifteen double-hung sash windows on the right side and an eight-over-twelve double-hung sash window on the left side. The latter window is now permanently closed with shutters because it is partially blocked by the roof of the clapboard addition. Two six-over-six double-hung sash windows appear only on the north gable end at the chimney area. Windows on the west, south and north sides of the clapboard addition are all of double-hung, two-over-two sash typical of Victorian style. The rear (east) side of the addition has two six-over-six double-hung sash windows.

Shutters survive on most windows and are still fully operable. They are painted a dark grey and each have two sections of louvres.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: A mineral surface, asphalt shingle gable roof shelters the brick house. A tin-covered, disorganized gable roof spreads over the addition.
 - b. Cornice: The brick house has a simple box cornice. The major gable of the addition has a molded cornice with dentils. A decorative gable end arch with odd designs enhances the simple clapboarding.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: A four foot, dirt-floored crawlspace exists under the brick part of the house. Its clearance was probably higher as flooding has increased depth of the earth.
- b. First floor: The entrance in the right hand bay leads to the large entrance hall which includes a large stairway. A well-proportioned parlor is to the left, while entrance to the dining room is to the right beyond and under the staircase. A hall leads from the dining room to the newly added modern kitchen. To the right of the hall is a small room which was a kitchen and further on the right is a screen porch. On the left of the hall is a bedroom. The bedroom is reached as well from the large entrance hall. The door to the bedroom may have originally been a door to the exterior.
- c. Second floor: The stairway in the right side of house leads to the second floor hall. A doorway on the west wall of the hall leads to a modern bathroom. To the north of the hall is a large bedroom which is over the parlor.
- d. Attic: The attic runs the entire length of the brick part of the building. It is reached from the second floor by a one-platform turn stair on the south side.

2. Stairway: A large elegant round-turned stairway is in the entrance hall. The interior wall above the stairs in the rounded portion, curves with the run of the stairs. The curved handrail is unbroken until it reaches the second floor hall. Finely executed floral scroll detailing runs the length of the open string on the staircase to the second floor. A less ornate scroll detailing appears at each step on the open string run to the attic level.
3. Flooring: Unpainted random width hardwood planks appear throughout the house. The newly-added kitchen has linoleum flooring.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Generally, wallpaper appears throughout the house. However, in some cases it has been painted. In the parlor the walls are painted lavender above the chair rail and beige below. All rooms have white ceilings. All woodwork is painted beige.

5. Doorways and doors: The front door to the interior is a French door with panels. The remaining doors are mortise and tenon with inserted panels. Three panels with moldings appear in the jamb of the doorway between the front hall and the parlor.
6. Decorative features and trim: The brick part of the house has an ornate chair rail with incised floral and "geometric" designs.

The Federal style parlor and bedroom mantelpieces are particularly noteworthy. The parlor mantelpiece has a pair of reeded Doric pilasters on either side of firebox.

In the top of the pilasters and in the center of the mantel are blocks with incised floral designs. A band with a variety of incised designs appears on top of the blocks, running across the mantel. Same design pattern of the parlor mantelpiece is repeated on the bedroom mantelpiece, with the exception of single reeded Doric pilasters and reeded blocks with incised curvy horizontal lines.

7. Hardware: Porcelain door knobs appear on some of the doors. Large old-fashioned box locks appear on some doors.
8. Mechanical equipment: A newly placed gas floor heater uses the old basement fireplace for heating. Modern gas heating units are placed in the floor of the hall and living room. A plenum with an ornamental grate appears between the living room and the bedroom.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The main facade of the house faces 5° north of west (275°). The major part of the Victorian addition faces south. Washington's original rough cut limestone sidewalk runs in front of the house and is well maintained. A creek, usually dry, with stone retaining walls, runs perpendicular to and under Main Street just north of the house. It drains the eastern portion of the property. Main Street in Washington originally followed the terrain; however in recent times, the road was leveled and now runs four foot above the sidewalk in front of the house.
2. Outbuilding: A brick outbuilding sits in the rear yard, east of the house. See Original plans and construction section for a detailed description of the structure.

Prepared by: Ronald J. Burch,
Project Historian
and
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Historic American Buildings
Survey
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PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early Views:

Coleman, J. Winston. Kentucky, A Pictorial History. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1971. Old photo p. 46.

Coleman, J. Winston. Historic Kentucky. Lexington: Henry Clay Press, 1968. Photo p 170.

Limestone Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, Paxton Inn, Washington, Kentucky,. Photo of entrance, 1940.

Mason County Museum, Maysville, Kentucky. Early photo shows portion of south porch, built ca. 1800.

Lexington Courier-Journal (n.d.). Clipping from scrapbook of Mrs. W. W. Weis, Maysville, Kentucky. Dim view of rear of house and outbuilding.

Maysville Daily-Independent (n.d.). Clipping from scrapbook of Mrs. W. W. Weis, Maysville, Kentucky. Early photo.

B. Interviews: June 18, 1975 - Mr. W. W. Catron, Washington, Kentucky. Mr. Catron (born 1898) lived in the house about 1925.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deed Books: Mason County Court Clerk's Office, Maysville, Kentucky.

2. Secondary and published sources:

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The Daily Independent. Newspaper articles. Maysville, Kentucky, March 16, 1965.

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Maysville Public Ledger. Newspaper articles. Maysville, Kentucky, June, 2, 1965.

Sunday Courier Journal. Newspaper articles. Lexington, Kentucky, October 2, 1966.

Courier Journal. Newspaper articles. Lexington, Kentucky

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in co-operation with Old Washington, Inc. in the summer of 1975. Under the supervision of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, a documentation of nine structures and one site was produced by Perry Benson (University of Pennsylvania), the project supervisor; Ronald Burch (Cornell University), the project historian; Mark Hall (Pennsylvania State University), Kenneth Payson (Cornell University), William F. Petell (Syracuse University) and Steven Shapiro (University of Maryland), student assistant architects. Susan McCown, a HABS staff historian in the Washington, D.C. office, edited the written data for preparation of transmittal to the Library of Congress.

ADDENDUM TO
MARSHALL KEY HOUSE
(FRANCIS TAYLOR HOUSE)
Main Street
Washington
Mason County
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